

# STAYING INDEPENDENT AND BEING PREPARED FOR MEDICAL EMERGENCIES IN YOUR HOME

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Like many communities in Maine, Scarborough has an ever increasing population that is aging in place. Many reading this are themselves, or have loved ones that are facing the day to day challenges of remaining independent. Have you ever considered what you would do if you had a medical emergency while home alone? As an individual with aging parents, you can rest assured I have been focused on helping them prepare for any such events. A couple ways to accomplish this is to be sure there is a consistent way for you or your loved one to access 911, and conversely a way for 911 (First Responders) to gain access when they arrive. In this article, we will talk about some possible solutions.

## Home Emergency Medical Alert Activation Systems

If you're considering such a system, which should you choose? The wide variety of features, service options, and fees can make it challenging to figure out what's best for you. Also, you might wonder whether you can simply rely on the technology you already have, such as a smartphone? This could be risky because it's unlikely that you have your smartphone with you all the times. How many of us get up from a chair and leave it there. If you don't have an emergency response system on your body that is going to stay on your body, you could be at risk.

And if you're considering a digital assistant such as Amazon's Alexa, for this purpose, note that it may not have all the features you need. For example, Alexa and Google Home can dial landline and mobile phone numbers. But right now, neither can call 911. All medical alerts can dial 911 and family members.

## 3 Key Questions to Answer First

When you're ready to begin shopping for a medical alert, you'll need to make three decisions that will affect the overall functionality of your system and how much you'll pay. (***Scarborough Fire Department does not endorse any one product***)

### **Do You Want a Home-Based or Mobile System?**

Originally, medical alert systems were designed to work inside your home with your landline telephone and you can still go that route. Many companies now also offer the option of home-based systems that work over a cellular network for those who may not have a landline any longer. With these systems, pressing the wearable call button allows you to speak to a dispatcher through a base unit located somewhere in your home.

Many companies offer mobile options as well. You can use these systems at home, but they'll also allow you to call for help while you're out and about. These operate over cellular networks and incorporate GPS technology. This way, if you get lost or press the call button for help but are unable to talk, the monitoring service can find you. Someone who is frail and doesn't leave the house often may not need a mobile system, while an active older adult may want added protection outside the home,

### **2. Should Your System Be Monitored or Not?**

I would recommend a system that is monitored, meaning that the call button connects you with someone at a 24/7 dispatching center. But you have the option to choose a system that isn't monitored. With these, when you press the call button, the device automatically dials a friend or family member on

your programmed emergency call list. These products can often be set up to call multiple people and to contact emergency services if you don't get an answer from someone on your list.

A key difference between the two is price. Monitored systems carry a monthly fee in addition to the purchase price for the device. But with unmonitored systems, you generally pay only for the device itself. Monitored systems may also have other fees, such as activation fees as well as minimum commitments or contracts. And their cancellation and return policies can vary from company to company.

### **3. Should You Add a Fall-Detection Feature?**

Some companies offer the option of automatic fall detection for an additional monthly fee.

Manufacturers say these devices sense falls when they occur and automatically contact the dispatch center, just as they would if you had pressed the call button. This feature can certainly provide piece of mind for caregivers however, they have been known to have false alarms.

When choosing the best product for you or your loved one, be sure to ask questions and have a good understanding of all the features. Some questions you should be asking:

- Is there a contract?
- What is the cost to have you medical pendant monitored?
- Does it require a landline telephone connection?
- Are there additional equipment or maintenance costs?

It's crucial for you to do your research and ask for references. Consumer reports does have some good evaluation data on several products that are available here in Maine. While Scarborough Fire Department will not endorse any one product, you can certainly call us or email me, Deputy Chief Rich Kindelan with any questions. ([rkindelan@scarboroughmaine.org](mailto:rkindelan@scarboroughmaine.org))